

Dystopian blancmange

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

What's that coming over the hill? Is it a monster? Quite possibly throngs of the rancid, infected dimwits. First and foremost though it's - to date - the solitary Spanish-produced game I've looked at in-depth, even if developers Dinamic have done their utmost to disguise the fact by lacing it with American patriotism and paraphernalia at every opportunity.

'After the War' is a traditional, scrolling beat 'em up set in downtown Manhattan in a post-apocalyptic, radiation-drenched futuristic world where the unmistakably humble objective is to escape to a slightly less rabid-zombie-rat infested biosphere, preferably before your face is warped into something resembling Sloth from The Goonies.

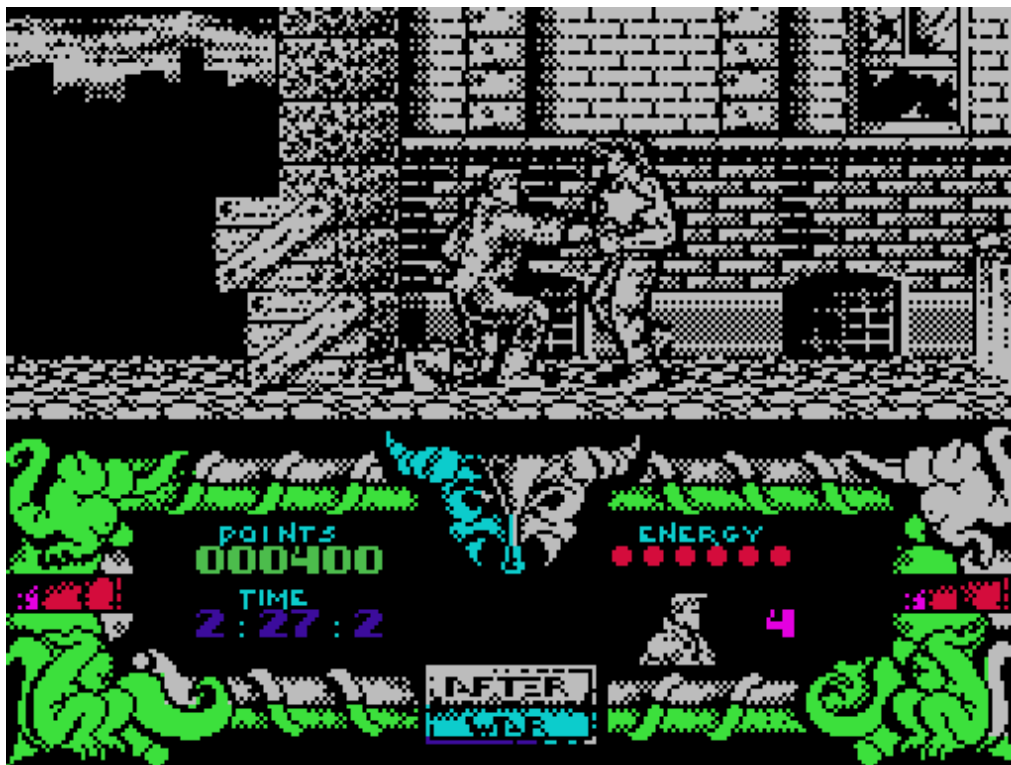
Aesthetically and thematically the game appears to have been modelled on post-apocalyptic action movies such as...

- Escape from New York (1981) - note the emphasis on the iconic Statue of Liberty.

- The Ultimate Warrior (1975) involving starving outlaws and a deadly chase through New York's subway system.
- The Bronx Warriors (1982) featuring a rollerskating gang known as The Zombies.

All set in the same region of the US, they are largely concerned with survival under extreme duress. You'll soon see how the above 'trivia' is relevant to the matter in hand.

Gaming wise, After the War closely resembles the diabolically shoddy, flip screen beat 'em up Manhattan Dealers by Simarils released earlier in the same year. It stars Inspector Harry, a hard as nails cop tasked with cleaning up the drug-ridden New York streets, and isn't worthy of wasting any more precious words on.



After the War was released for the Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, Commodore 64, DOS, MSX and ZX Spectrum. As crazy as it sounds the DOS 'port' was actually the Spectrum version running under an emulator. Would it be too easy and cheap

to make a joke about developers taking shortcuts so they can get their heads down for a siesta? Yes? Phew! Good thing I sidestepped *that* lazy stereotype then.



For the purposes of literary exposition you're Jonathan 'Jungle' Rogers and you exist in the year 2019 (30 years away at the time - also the magic number for Back to the Future fans incidentally). A nuclear holocaust has occurred due to political squabbling of the highest, most antagonistic order& which is better, Pepsi or Coke? probably. Given that Coke cans serve as your energy boosters and Coca-Cola vending machines can be seen strewn about the dilapidated landscape, I think we can safely assume which clambered out of the mire with its shiny, swirly logo and wholesome laboratory-sired ingredients list intact. Ironically, either way, the loser is tooth enamel and bowels everywhere.



Toxic filth soft drink preferences aside, you begin in the urban Forbidden Zone with a view to drudging across the treacherous, ravaged streets (making sure you wait for the green man to flash of course!) to reach the XV-238 launching platform located inside the secure compound of a schizophrenic psychopath known as Professor McJerin. Apparently only he holds the keys to the kingdom and the means to escape to the radiation-free outer colonies. Why he hasn't already used it himself to evacuate to a tropical paradise island off the coast of South America is anyone's guess.

First though you must swerve the 'ravenous' cannibals (some of which are as chunky as Big Daddy) and thieves long enough to reach the subway entrance where the radiation levels begin to taper off & a canny substitute for a countdown timer in the first stage, oddly 'topped' *down* by collecting clock icons.



A lift shaft neatly marks your exit from the derelict cesspit, taking you down to McJerin's subterranean military lair guarded by his 'Mega Kangaroo Destroyers'. Contrary to popular belief these weren't brought into existence to eradicate mega kangaroos (or even the *standard* variety), although I can see why you might hop to that assumption.

In the meantime you'll encounter (and pulverise) many wild and wacky inhabitants that could easily have been plucked from a flamboyant, West End musical rendition of Mad Max. Skin-tight lyra and pristinely polished trainers are all the rage, the more gaudily coloured the better. You'd never know access to clean running water and Wham!'s florid wardrobe might be an issue what with the world currently undergoing a complete meltdown of cataclysmic proportions.



Slathering, emaciated canines, twitching, feverish rodents, and garish, leotarded wrestlers on rollerskates swinging baseball bats are amongst the first to roll out the unwelcome mat in this desolate wasteland. Not far behind are the 'radio-gladiators' who hurl dynamite and try to mug you.





Phase two's cronies don't get any friendlier: Manhattan 'punkies' tooled up with Magnum C-GSI revolvers lurk amongst the ransacked cityscape and car graveyards.

If you were praying phase three might offer up some light relief, think again. Meet the R.A.D. Bulls. If this is New York hospitality at its finest, I'm not coming again. It'll have to be Butlins next year.

Each horizontally scrolling playfield is split into two separate planes allowing you to climb and descend between the upper and lower platforms as and when necessary a la Dragon Ninja or Shadow Warrior. This lends an impression of depth as well as offering a useful escape route if the action ever gets a bit too crowded.

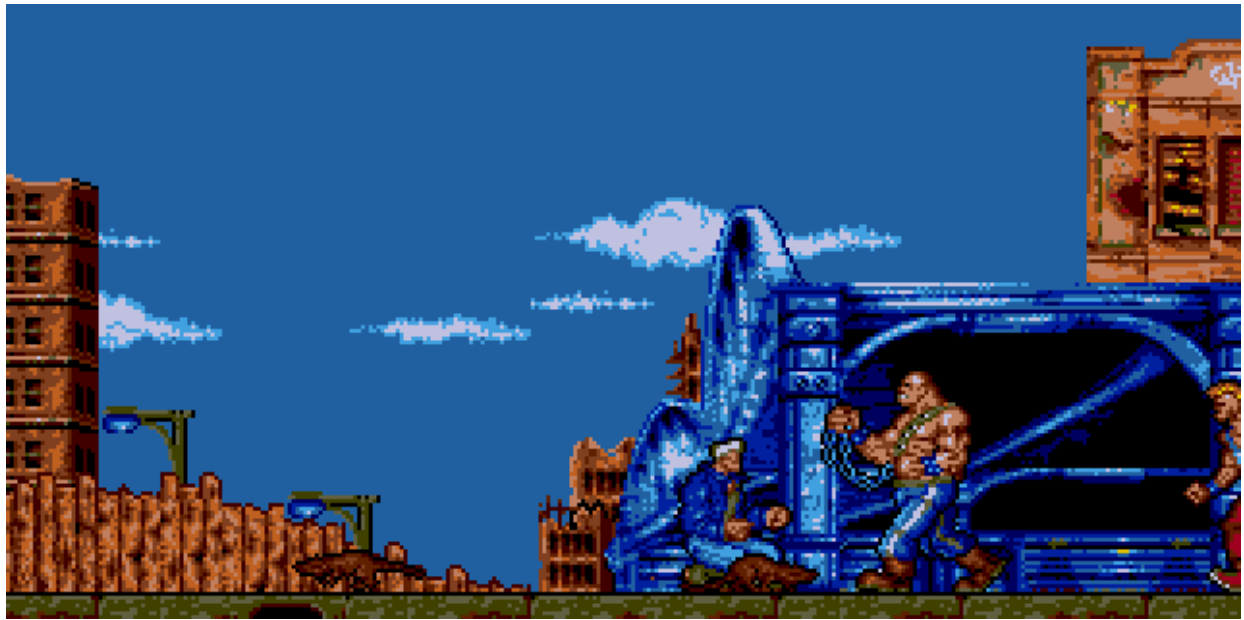
According to the manual, After the War is "made up of two totally different loads", further divided into individual phases. Ironically it's the latter that need to 'load' while the game freezes the action without warning, often mid jump, yanking you out of the moment with a jolt, leaving you wondering if it has crashed. This and a lack of in-game music - or *any* music to be precise - does nothing to contribute to

the sense of foreboding that should accompany a game of this bleak portent.

You have a range of twenty possible moves at your disposal including two punches, two jabs, and three kicks, though this *does* include the obvious ones like duck and jump that don't really count. To take advantage of them all you'll need to assign a keyboard button to kicks when using a joystick, or play entirely via the keyboard. Punches are always activated through the joystick's fire button if that's your controller of choice.

Early on we must rely solely on our limbs as weapons, real ones not becoming available until we can hijack them from any thugs not holding on to their salvation tightly enough. Disaffected, dodgy cops for instance are fair game, and being *American* police, they come armed with handy revolvers. A welcome upgrade (and more useful than chains) until the FX machine gun with its free-cycling, arc aiming system and unlimited ammo shows up under your metaphorical Christmas tree!

What's really helpful is that just before enemies kick the proverbial bucket we get a flashed up text message to indicate that they're on their 'last hit'. Actually it's not that useful at all because you'd keep whacking them until they peg it regardless. It *is* an endearing throwback to comic book style captions that feature in many coin-op beat 'em ups, however. Hurry! Next paragraph!

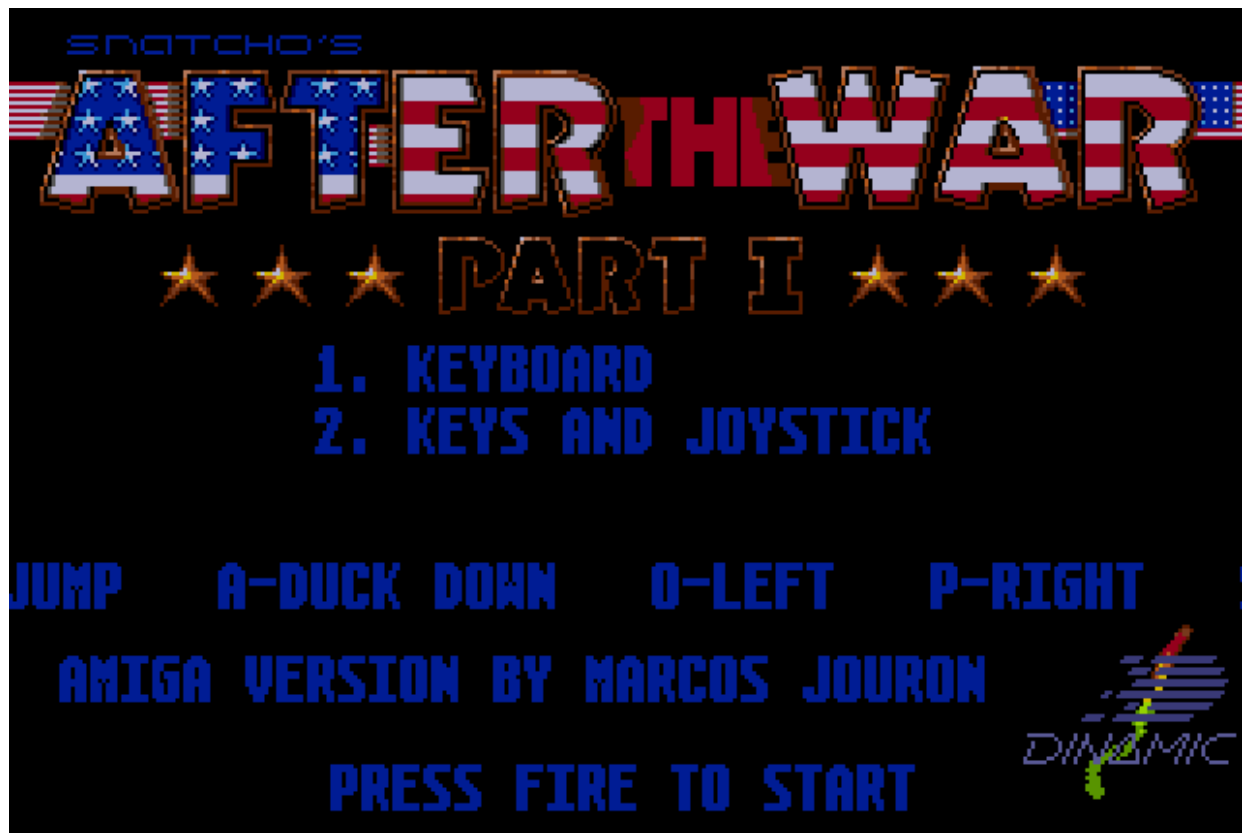


End of area bosses are athletic to the extreme, taking inspiration from popular muscle culture of the period it would seem. One gymnastic somersaulter could easily be the bambino of a harebrained cloning experiment involving Dan Dare and Dolph Lundgren, while further down the tracks Mike Tyson's doppelganger puts in an appearance.

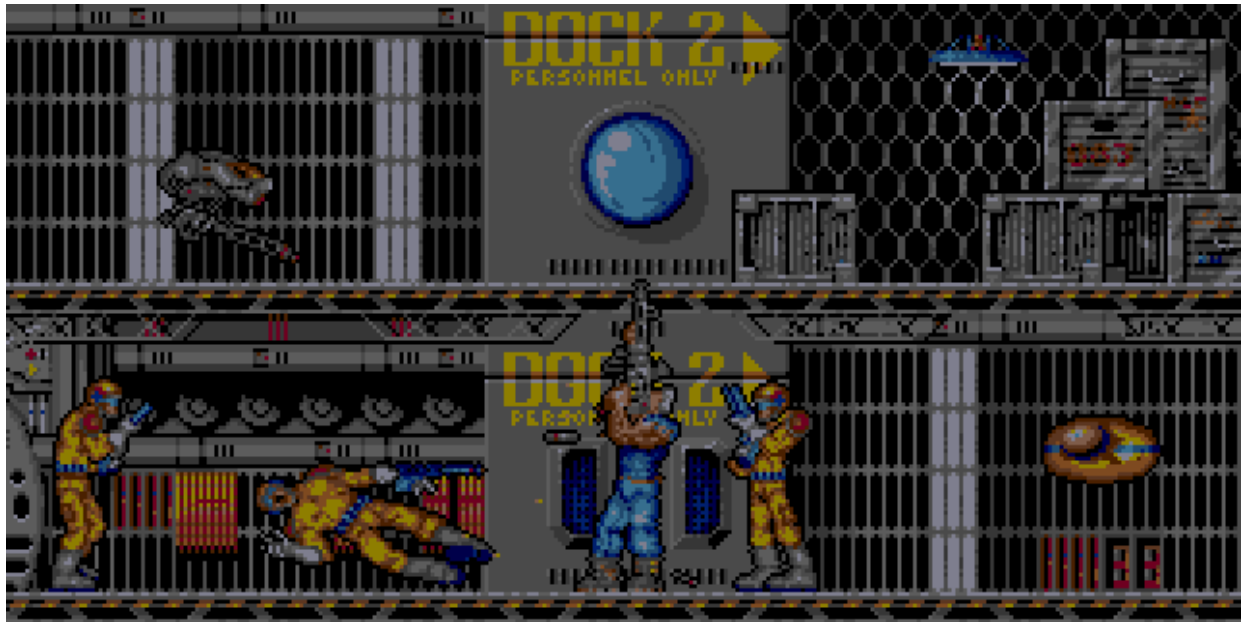


The game's manual boasts that "After the War has sprites twice the size of those of any other video game". Hmm, pinch of salt anyone? This may just about possibly-maybe be true under some circumstances, in certain countries, if you squint a bit, yet if you're going to go making grandiose claims like that you really need to back them up with the tech specs. You know, that sciencey stuff& feel free to suggest games featuring more biggerified spritegy in the comments.

Did you remember to write down the access code you were given on completion of part one? You'll need that in place of a save disk. In fact you'll need it regardless so get ready to enter it when prompted.



In part two time is measured by a 'countdown to self-destruction' represented by a bomb timer. Now there's a cheery thought! When this ticks down to zero you lose all your lives and it's goodnight Vienna. In any case it's not suicide you need to concern yourself with when there are plenty of other willing accomplices to hand who are more than happy to help end your days.

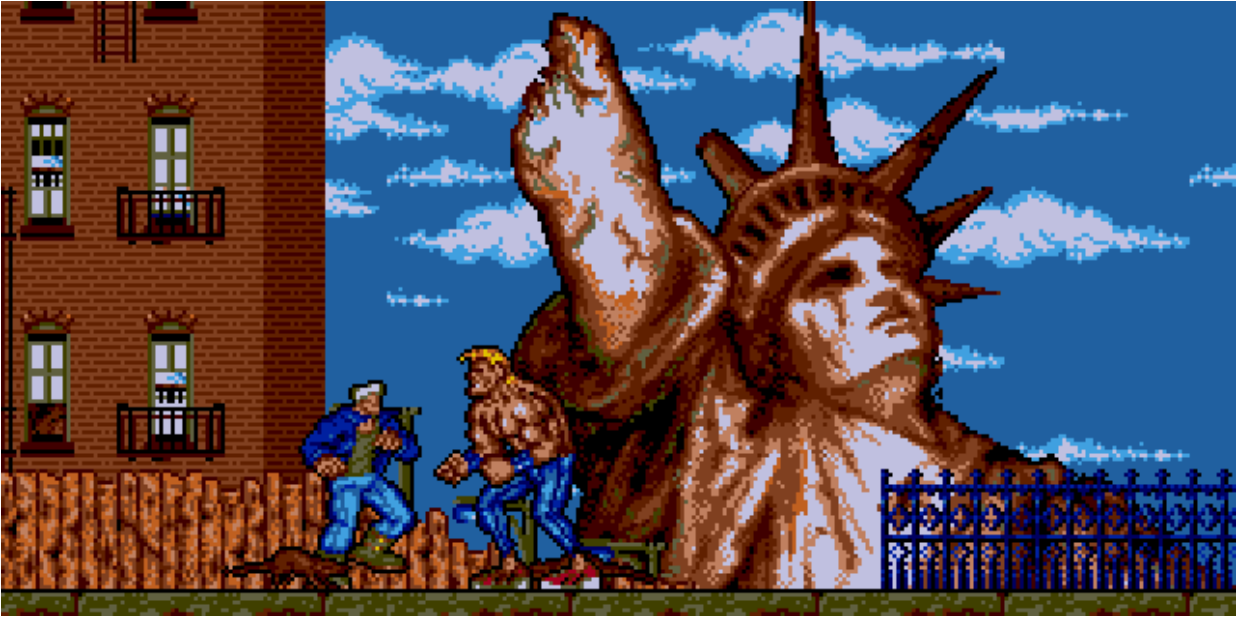


There's the Flying Rat defence robots and the PPS (Progressive Pneumatic Shooting) Torretes in the subway, while Kangaroo Fighters and Mega Kangaroo Destroyers - each protected by Uranium P-24 armour plating - await your arrival at McJerin's base. Each of the 'roo opponents look identical except the latter are slightly larger in stature. Neither can leap astronomically long distances, they simply spring down from higher platforms, not all that more energetically than any of the other goons.



They're the ones deemed worthy of a name-drop in the documentation anyhow. Some other honourable mentions include the zombie boogie men with their arms outstretched ready to pounce in the hackneyed fairy-tale manner, the SS guards togged in blue wellies and yellow marigold gloves, and the gnarled ceiling-crawling trolls.

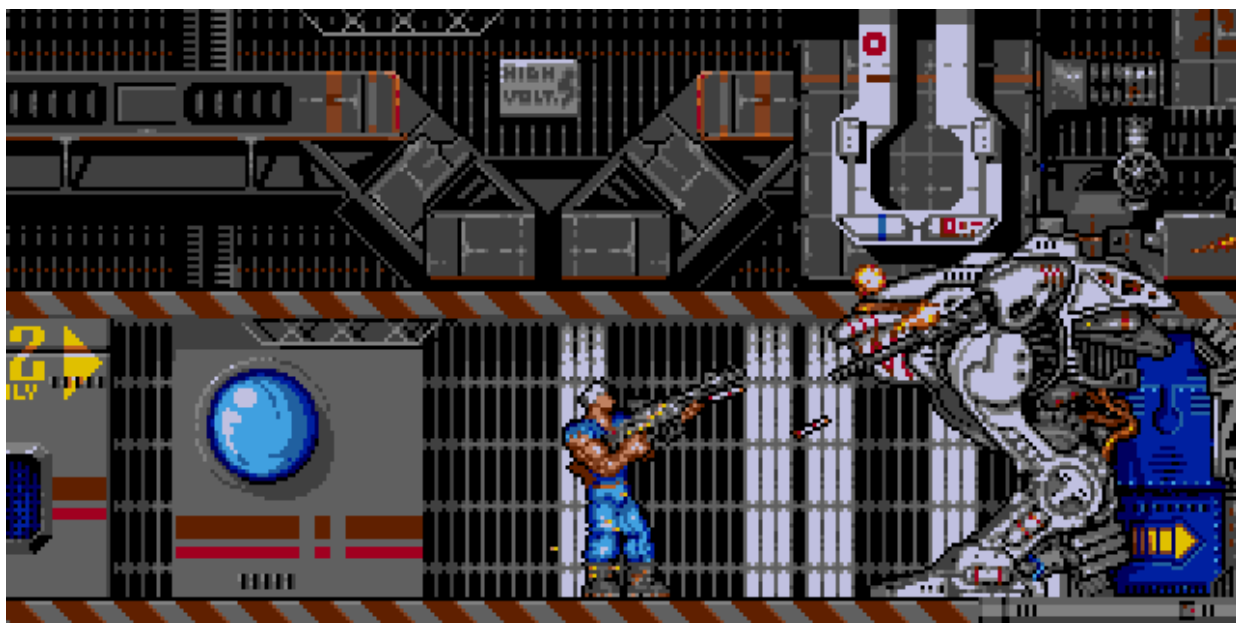
While we're playing eye spy (with my little eye), do I earn any points for spotting the Rumble Fish movie poster? This is a reference to the 1983 movie directed by Francis Ford Coppola starring Mickey Rourke and Matt Dillon, centred around American motorcycle gang culture. Perhaps it was one of the developer's favourite films. The correlation with Armageddon is pretty weak otherwise.



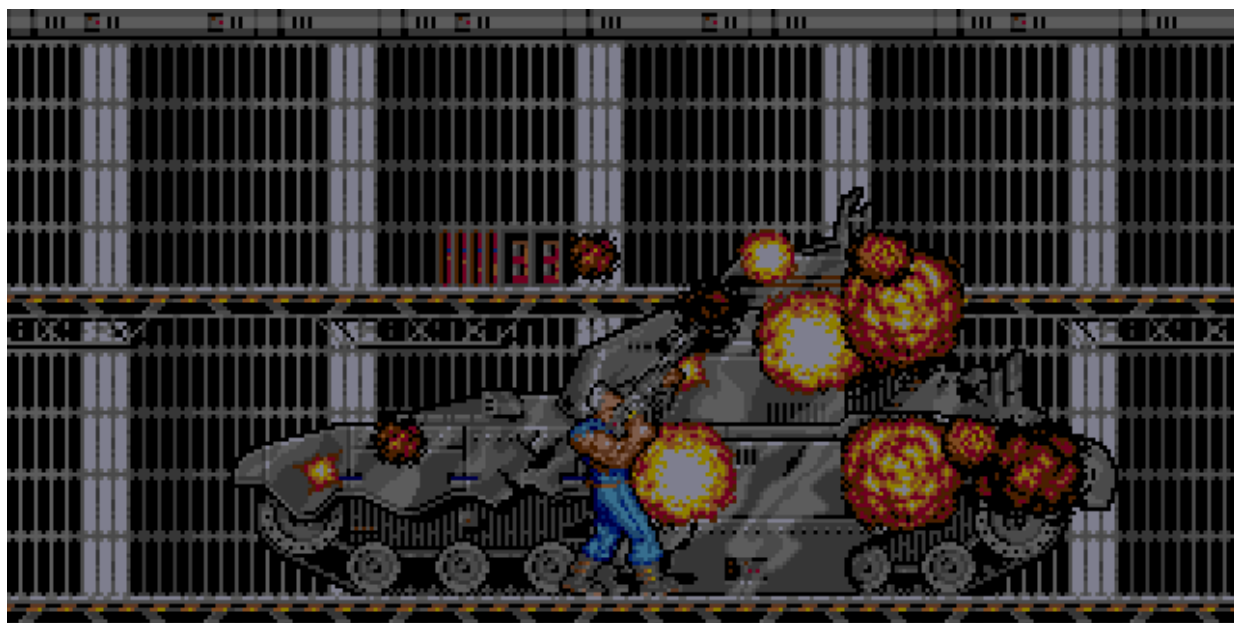
A more appropriate movie allusion is the sunken Statue of Liberty in the graffiti ed street level, much like in Planet of the Apes, if that's what it is. It may have nothing at all to do with the movie - we *are* in New York after all, and the place *has* been nigh on razed to the ground in the aftermath of the Great Fizzy Drink War of some time before 2019. Dinamic were really taken with the Statue of Liberty idea it seems - note that miniature souvenir trophy versions can be snagged for extra points.



It's a relentlessly tough game so you've done well if you get to see the prof's hideaway hangout and his endless procession of henchmen draped in radiant yellow haz-mat suits. Kick those into touch and next in line on the baddie conveyor belt is ED-209 - believe it or not - who ever so helpfully comes equipped with a pivotal deconstruction tip: 'destroy gun'. With this neutered he's a sitting duck who can only stomp back and forth looking bewildered.



He's a big boss, though not *The Big Bad Final Boss*. That's a hulking, mondo tank so colossal it stretches the breadth of both the upper and lower platforms with at least one independent gun trained on each area leaving no stone unturned by rapid-fire machine gun slugs.



Your reward for somehow obliterating the oversized death-monger isn't exactly the satisfying resolution to the against the odds survival story we might have hoped for. It abruptly cuts to a text reminder that "this is after the war", followed by an advert for Dinamic's upcoming title; A.M.C. Astro-Marine Corps.

It could be that now the path to McJerin's springboard is clear it has run out of batteries, or has been damaged by an explosion. How will we ever know if Jungle John got out alive? Enquiring minds need to know these things! We've bashed, we've mashed, we've wrestled with the unresponsive controls and mindlessly repetitive gameplay all for nothing.

Will the sequel hold the answers? Is it, in fact, a *sequel* or an entirely different game? Do you care enough to find out? Do *h*

